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SUBJECT: DPRK Asylum-seekers in Hanoi: Update

Ref: A. Hanoi 1373; B. Hanoi 136

1. (SBU) Visiting UNHCR Regional Representative Hasim Utkan and Vietnam Country Representative Vu Anh Son provided additional information on the asylum attempt by seven North Koreans in the Thai Embassy (Ref A). Utkan, in Hanoi to meet with visiting PRM A/S Dewey and GVN officials (septel), was asked by his headquarters to "see what he could do," at the request of the RTG. Utkan met for lunch June 10 with Thai Ambassador Krit Kraichitti, who reported that his Government was nervous about how to respond to the position the GVN initially appeared to staking out, namely, that the seven asylum-seekers were illegal migrants and had to be turned over to Vietnamese authorities.

2. (SBU) During Utkan's subsequent meeting with MFA Senior Vice Minister Le Cong Phung, the GVN seemed to take a more conciliatory line, noting that the GVN would facilitate the seven's departure as long as the Thais provide travel documentation similar to what the French and Swedish Governments did in December (Ref B). Senior VFM Phung also reportedly told Utkan that it "may be possible" for the UNHCR to play a role. During A/S Dewey's own meeting with Vice Foreign Minister Vu Dzong, the Ambassador urged the GVN to resolve this matter quickly and humanely.

3. (SBU) Utkan reported that he was able to sit in on the June 10 interview of the seven North Koreans conducted by an officer from the ROK Embassy. The group (one family of four and three individuals) want to travel to the ROK. According to the UNHCR's Son, this response, and the atmospherics of the interview -- they seemed "very frightened" -- were enough for the UNHCR's "first assessment." In a later conversation with Emboff, the Thai Ambassador said he would "look to the ROK" for finding a solution to this problem.

4. (SBU) ROK Embassy Political First Secretary Lee Kang-kuk reported June 13 that he is in regular contact with his Thai counterparts and that there will be another interview the afternoon of June 13 to "establish the identities of the seven." The UNHCR's Son would also be present. Lee noted that, as far as he knows, this is the first time the UNHCR has played this kind of role and the ROKG "welcomes it." The ROKG agrees with the GVN's position that the Thais will have to issue travel documents to the seven to facilitate their departure. (Note: Utkan told us June 10 that his understanding is that the RTG does not issue travel documents to non-Thais. End Note.)

MARINE